



Social media in an integrated marketing communication strategy

Case: Off-road Finnmark in Alta, Norway

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ABSTRACT

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<p>The objective of this research work is to find out how to integrate social media in Off-Road's Finnmark marketing communications. One of the aims of this research is to help the case company to increase the usage of social media in their marketing strategy. The next objective is to develop a marketing strategy for Off-Road Finnmark, in order to assist the organization to implement social media.</p> <p>Relevant articles and literature was reviewed in order to have data to develop the literature review chapter. Using the data obtained from those sources it was possible to define the core concepts of this Thesis work, such as social media. Other aspects were included like the way small and medium size enterprises are currently employing social media, and the advantages and disadvantages of social media.</p> <p>This is was a qualitative research, and it used a triangulation method to recollect the data for the literature review. For the empirical part an in-depth interview was conducted with the administrative manager from ORF, Connie Graumann. This interview was done with the purpose to have a perspective of what was the organization's understanding and implementation of social media. The interview was divided into two parts. The first part was done via email and the second part was held through a Skype call. Literature research and previous practical experience with the company helped to provide depth to the analysis of the current situation and implementation of social media within their IMC.</p> <p>The findings from my research demonstrated that although the company has started to integrate social media to their marketing communications there was still space for improvement. Due to some obstacles, Off-Road Finnmark has not been able to completely benefit from using social media. With the aid of the strategy that was developed in this research, the case company can continue finding ways to keep social media as a supporting tool within their integrated marketing communications.</p>	
Keywords: social media, integrated marketing communications, ROI, Off-Road Finnmark, marketing	

ABREVIATIONS

HiF	Finnmark University College
IMC	Integrated marketing communications
ORF	Off-Road Finnmark, Norway
PR	Public relations
ROI	Return on investment
SIM score	Social influence marketing score

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and motivation

Over the last few years social media has been an ever-growing platform that has helped people interact and connect with friends, relatives, or even business all around the world. During 2012, Facebook reached the 1 billion user and most of the users are outside the United States (Tsukayama 2012). LinkedIn had over 85 million users in 2011, spread over 200 countries (Hellerd Bair & Parasnis 2011). In addition, to these statistics, Hellerd Baird and Parasnis (2011, 32) suggest that companies have the idea that they may be considered old fashioned if they did not count with their own social media site. The rapid growth of social media finds its explanation in the desire of companies to increase the interaction with their customers. An additional benefit of social media is the reduction of communication costs. Moreover, constant interaction with their customers can assist to improve the perception customers have of a company and this can generate an increased amount of business for the firm and a better understanding of their customer's perceptions (Hisaka 2012; Bullas 2012). This set of benefits has made social media the most preferred marketing tool in the business world of today (Karahan & Kazim Kirtis 2010, 261).

According to Safko (2010, 5) social media is defined as the media people use to interact with other users and to be social. At the same time the Safko, despite his short definition of social media, wants to stress the importance of the application of technologies and tools. Furthermore, Alqvist, Bäck, Halonen and Heinonen (2010, 3) propose that this definition has to be broken down into three parts i.e. user generated content, community interaction and web 2.0. User generated content which is any type of information that is constructed and shared by users such as photos, music, videos or even photo tags can even include text since blogging is part of social media. The people that construct and share information create a community of interests. The interactions within the users keep the social relationships active since the content that is shared among the members helps to develop the community furthermore, providing a better environment for the users. Web 2.0 is the tools that enable the sharing of media and interaction among users (Alqvist & Bäck & Halonen & Heinonen 2010, 3.)

Social media can be a tool used to move people, and create interest in certain event, product, brand, etc. A good example comes from Andrew Peters, the regional director of The Pacific West Communications. Mr. Peters was the brains behind the promotion of the Singapore Tattoo Show for which he used Facebook to connect with potential visitors to the event. The organizers expected around 5000 visitors for the event, and in the end 15,000 people visited the event. (Meerman Scott 2010, 40.) This example demonstrates that social media can be a useful tool that can help other companies and firms generate awareness about their products or services.

My main motivation for conducting this research is to develop a way in which social media can become a support tool for Off-Road Finnmark's (henceforth ORF) integrated marketing communications. The company is not employing social media extensively as part of their communication strategy despite the fact they have the desire to internationalize and expand. Another motivation is to provide ideas to ORF through the development of a strategy to employ social media within their IMC.

The other motivation for conducting this research is that in 2011 a selected group of students from Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences worked with the case company in Norway to find a way to internationalize the Off-Road Finnmark bicycle race. This was part of the students' Practice Module in Alta University. Following this project, I wanted to continue assisting the company with their aspiration of expanding their race to new markets. Off-Road Finnmark can be a good example to demonstrate that social media can become an important part of a company's IMC and provide the opportunity to interact more with existing and potential customers.

1.2 Case company introduction

The idea to form Off-Road Finnmark started to develop in the summer of 2007 in Finnmark University College. The project was started by Knut Korsnes and Jørund Greibrokk, because both starters wanted to develop a unique and long event which could be done on the Finnmark mountain plateau. A group of people from different areas of expertise worked

together to develop the idea for the Off-Road Finnmark race, but it was not until May of 2008 that Finnmarksritt AS was founded. During that year there were some cycling tests performed and the first race was held. The event only had 8 racers but it relied with 50 volunteers and students from the Finnmark University took pictures and videos of the event. The event only had one race but still managed to attract some attention locally. Since 2009 the company has been able to offer three different races to the people interested in participating. ORF is interested in increasing the amount of participants, and the company would like to have racers from different parts of the world. From previous experience, the organization does not wish to increase in its size but want to generate more interest about the race outside Norway. Off-Road Finnmark has seven members and like it was discussed earlier each one has an expertise on a different area, their talents complement each other to keep the company going.

One of the reasons that Off-Road Finnmark was chosen as the case company is because of their desire to use new methods to internationalize the race. Since I had the opportunity to work in the practice module last autumn with them, I already had a perspective of what the company wanted to achieve and this knowledge motivated me. Finally, the opportunity to assist the company further to market the race and further expand my knowledge about different marketing methods made me select this firm.

1.3 Research questions and objectives

My research objective is to assist Off-road Finnmark to develop a marketing communication strategy, in which social media can assist them to achieve their marketing objectives. The reason this topic needs to be researched is because of social media's recent breakthrough. Even if social media usage is still in early adoption stages for most business (Hellerd Bair & Parasnis 2011, 1), it can become a useful marketing tool. Off-Road Finnmark can benefit from this tool because of its ability to connect with potential visitors or customers.

The first research question will investigate the role of social media in integrated marketing communications from a general point of view. The answer will clarify the importance of social media in general. The first research question is as follows:

What is the role of social media in integrated marketing communications?

In order to be able to answer this question, first it is important to define the concepts of social media and integrated marketing communications. Literature and previous research is used for defining the two concepts. Answering this question will provide a knowledge base to understand social media and IMC.

How Off-Road Finnmark can continue to implement social media in their current IMC?

To answer this question, an in-depth interview with Connie Graumann, the administrative manager of Off-Road Finnmark is conducted. In order to verify to which extent the organization understand and utilizes social media.

How Off-Road Finnmark's IMC and social media can lead the company to achieve their objectives?

The answers from the interview of Connie Graumann are analysed to answer this question. The data obtained through this interview will assist to development a strategy for ORF. This strategy will provide advice on how to continue to employ social media within their IMC. Further suggestions on how to continue to work with social media are given.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The second chapter of this research is focused in the methodology used, defining the main concepts and justifying their usages. Chapter three develops the theoretical framework within which the concepts of social media and integrated marketing communications are defined. Furthermore, advantages and disadvantages of social media are discussed, as well

as the usage of social media as a tool of communication by small and medium enterprises. In chapter four the analysis of the findings from the interview is done, and a strategy according to the results is developed. Chapter five includes the conclusions for this research.

2 METHODOLOGIES

The research methods that were used in this research work are discussed and justified below. In other words, qualitative research, in-depth interview and case study are dealt within this chapter.

2.1 Research process

The first step that was taken for this research work was to get a verbal agreement with the company Off-Road Finnmark to enable me to conduct this research work. This research was developed as a qualitative research. During the first part of the research, the theoretical framework was developed in order to explain the core concepts of the work. The second part consists of the analysis of an in-depth interview with the management of the company, specifically with Mrs Conny Graumann the administrative manager and IT expert from ORF. The reason she was interviewed was, because when I first contacted the company to request collaboration for my thesis, the request was forwarded to Mrs Graumann. After the initial contact she handled any question or request regarding this research. The information obtained from that interview helped to develop the strategy to implement social media and to know how the company understands social media.

The empirical part of this work consisted in an in-depth interview with Mrs Conny Graumann from Off-Road Finnmark's management. The interview consisted in ten questions and the questions were related to the research questions of this work. The questionnaire was designed, so that the answers could provide enough data for the analyses chapter and help to understand the current situation of their IMC. The information obtained from the interview helps determine the company's expectations and what their knowledge regarding social media. When the interview with the organization's management was completed, the strategy was developed based on the needs of the company. Those needs were determined after the interview was conducted and the data went through the analysis process. The empirical part of this work provides the foundation to find out and understand what the company needs and in which way it is heading. Meanwhile, the theoretical framework of the thesis provided support to the data that was obtained through a data

triangulation approach. In other words data obtained from different sources used to define social media and IMC, to generate understanding about the concepts. Creating a knowledge base is fundamental because it can help to understand further the main terms of the thesis and to provide evidence and support to the results obtained from the interview.

2.2 Qualitative research

Merriam (2009, 13) quoting Van Maanen (1979) defines qualitative research as an umbrella term that includes a range of research techniques which altogether look to find the meaning of phenomena occurring in a somewhat natural state in the social world. In addition, Denzin and Lincoln (2000, 45) suggest that, researchers working with this method will look into things in their natural state to understand events according to the meanings provided by others. Both definitions have a similar approach, which develops the idea that the phenomena which will be investigated will happen in a non- altered state. This research method according to Key (1997) has the following characteristics:

- Purpose: Understanding – Looks to comprehend the interpretations of people.
- Reality: Dynamic, reality changes as the perceptions of people change.
- Viewpoint: Insider, reality is what people perceive it to be.
- Values: Value bound, values play an important role, during the research and reporting processes.
- Focus: Holistic, what is sought after is a complete or total image.
- Orientation: Discovery, during data recollection, theories and hypothesis are developed. Data: Subjective, perceptions of people in the environment generate data.
- Instrumentation: Human, humans are the main instrument to collect data.
- Conditions: Naturalistic, investigations are held through natural conditions.
- Results: Valid, focused on the methods and design in order to generate “real”, “rich”, and “deep” data. (Key 1997.)

As with other research methods, qualitative research has advantages and disadvantages, one of the main advantages according to Boxil et al. (1997, 46), is that it provides an in-depth view of a certain topic. Boxil et al. also emphasize that the advantages, focus more on giving an in-depth data of certain topic, provide flexible method to the researcher and that it can be applied to different fields of research. On the other hand, one of the disadvantages of qualitative research is that it relies in the perceptions and assumptions of the general populace, the scope can be limited due to the in-depth nature of the data that can be obtained, and that the research can be unstructured and disorganized. (Key 1997; Boxil et al. 2009, 47.)

It is necessary to understand what type of outcome this research can lead to, in order to be used properly and get the necessary data to develop the thesis work. Even though, it has its weak points, still it was the method that could provide enough relevant data for the topic I was going to work with, additionally because it allows other research methods to be used. Qualitative data was used mainly used for this research, although some quantitative data was required for this research as well. It was used to develop the strategy for the company that would enable them to integrate social media in their marketing communications. Another reason that made qualitative research the ideal choice, it is because it provides an in-depth analysis of the topic being researched. Since the research work focus around social media and its integration to Off-Road Finnmark's marketing communications, this research method is able to provide enough specific and relevant data the develop the work further. In addition, to get the necessary details to develop the company's integrated marketing communication strategy.

2.3 Case Study

A case study can be defined according to Collis and Hussey (2009, 82) as a methodology that explores a phenomenon or case, in a natural setting utilizing a series of methods in order to obtain in-depth data. Authors provide several approaches to explain this concept, and for example Yin (2009, 17) quotes Schramm (1971) arguing that the essence of case study is to justify a decision or decisions: "why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result". Another concept is provided by Blakie (2010, 188) as

he quotes Goode and Hatt (1952, 339) and Creswell (1994) which both share a similar definition of case study, arguing that case studies focus on a single subject and that different methods of data collection could be used to obtain data. Furthermore, the author quotes Yin (2003a) who defines case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in its natural context, especially when the boundaries between the context and the phenomenon boundaries are not easily identifiable. This set of definitions can provide a good understanding of different approaches that can be used to understand case studies. Blakie(2010, 189.)

According to Blakie (2010, 191) case studies are often criticized due to the fact that it can be used for nothing more than for describing. The author also point out that researchers that are involved with theory testing and/or the usage of probability samples, do not favor this method due to the fact they consider it unsatisfactory for those purposes. In addition, the author discusses that there are three main criticisms when comparing case study with quantitative methods. The first point argues that the outcome of the research could be biased and the research could be disorganized. Blakie (2010, 192) partly refutes this point by arguing that, part of this belief is a prejudice by quantitative researchers who believe that only numbers can be a valid source to explain and describe phenomena validly and reliably. At the same time, he argues that this prejudice exist due to the fact that unlike quantitative research, qualitative research cannot be replicated due to the broad scope it uses which negates the possibility to researchers to influence the outcome.

The second point given is that case studies are not used for generalizing. The reason for this point is that: is not possible to generalize from only one case and it may be extremely difficult to compare the results from a number of cases used for the same purpose due to the fact of the uniqueness of each case. Blakie (2010, 192) suggests that the same criticism could be applied to single experiments or the use of only a single population. The last point arguments that case studies can take a great amount of time and can generate unmanageable amounts of information. The author quotes Yin (2003a, 11) which arguments that case studies do not need to take a long time, and that they can be developed in a manageable way. (Blakie 2010, 192.)

Case studies can draw some criticism from Yin and Blakie but still it was the more viable option selected to develop my thesis work. One of the reasons it is, it can help to generate in-depth data of certain topic and this thesis work looks to develop a way to integrate social media in Off-Road Finnmark's marketing communication strategy. Furthermore, it was needed to have a focus on the data that will be obtained, so it would be able to help the company to develop a plan to adopt that tool to their current strategy.

A holistic case study approach was selected, because it provides an in-depth look to Off-Road Finnmark's posture regarding the employment of social media and their marketing strategy. This means that the company and their strategy had to be analyzed in their own natural state, to be able to understand them in this particular situation. Therefore, using a method that could assist to find the perspective to develop this strategy was needed.

2.4 In-depth interview

An in-depth interview can be defined as qualitative technique designed to entice a clear picture of the interviewee's perspective on the research topic. During the process the interviewed part becomes the expert of the topic while the interviewer is considered the student. In addition, the techniques used by the interviewer are motivated by the desire to learn, all the details the participant is able to share regarding the research topic (Gerring et al. 2005, 2). The authors discuss that the strengths of this method rely on the ability to obtain sensitive data and the personal perspectives from the interviewed part regarding the researched topics. Similarly, Boyce and Neale (2006, 3) define the concept as a research method in which intensive individual interviews are held with small number of participants in order to obtain their own thoughts about a particular subject. Furthermore, they propose that this method is particularly useful when a personal thought about certain topic is needed or when trying to explore a subject in-depth. (Boyce & Neale 2006, 3.)

The in-depth interview has some key characteristics according to Lewis and Ritchie (2003, 139) the first point is that in-depth interviews try to combine structure with flexibility. While performing the interview, the interviewer will have a plan of the topics that will be analyzed. Due to the flexible nature of this method, the topics can be arranged in certain

order more suitable to the interviewee, and to have a better analysis of the responses provided. In addition, to allow the researcher to be more active and responsive regarding any spontaneous issue brought up by the interviewee. Secondly, the interview is interactive by nature the data is obtained through the interaction of the researcher and the interviewed. The first question asked by the researcher will motivate the interviewed, to talk freely when providing an answer to the question hence the next intervention by the interviewer will be determined by the answers provided by the interviewee. The last point argues that the researcher will use different methods and techniques, to achieve depth in the answers received from the interview. This means that usually the first response provided is barely at a “surface” level, leading the researcher to use follow up questions to obtain deeper and a complete understanding of the participant’s answers. The in-depth format allows to the researcher to acquire a complete picture of the factors influencing the interviewee’s answers, such as: reasons, feelings and beliefs (Lewis & Ritchie 2003, 140.)

These characteristics provide an idea of what this method looks to achieve, and what type of data can be obtained from it, but it is also necessary to understand its strengths and weaknesses so the method can be used in a proper manner. Boyce and Neale (2006, 3) propose that the strengths of the in-depth interview are: that the information provided is more detailed than what can be available through other methods such as surveys. Furthermore, they suggest that the interview may provide a more relaxed environment in which data will be collected. On the other hand, they propose that the limitations this method has are that the interviews are prone to bias information, due to the fact that the participants might try to prove certain point regarding the research topic or for other reasons they may provide biased responses. This process can be time intensive; it can be time consuming to go through the whole process of conducting the interview, transcribing the interview and analyzing the findings. The interviewer needs to have the appropriate training and interview techniques in order to obtain detailed and rich information. Proper techniques need to be used in order to conduct the interview and avoid the process to be stalled. Finally, the results obtained through this process cannot be generalized since only a small sample was studied and no other sampling methods were used. (Boyce & Neale 2006, 4.)

The reason this method was chosen to collect data for my thesis work was because of the deep analysis it can provide about Off-Road Finnmark and about their stance regarding one of the main topics of the research work which is, social media. The interview was made to Mrs. Conny Graumann, the administrative manager from ORF. The reason only one interview was held, it is because Off-Road Finnmark is a micro company, and it is composed of only 5 members so it was important for my thesis to work directly with the person that had the knowledge regarding how the integrated marketing communications were being handled within the company. In addition, to those reasons the information that was needed to develop my research was information related specifically on the company and their strategies so it was necessary to use a method that could assist to get in-depth details about that.

The interview was conducted in two parts, because of the necessity to get enough information to design a strategy for ORF. The first part of the interview was done via email although, the option of doing it through a web call was offered to Mrs. Connie Graumann. After the questions were reviewed and accepted by my supervisor Mr. Anthony Okuogume, I sent an email to Mrs. Graumann with the questionnaire. She confirmed to me that she received the questions, and asked for a few days to return her answer. After reviewing the questionnaire Mr. Okuogume pointed out that a second interview was needed in order to obtain additional data on some of the answers from the first interview.

A request for a second interview was sent to Mrs. Graumann with an explanation of why a second interview was required. The reason was that some of the answers required elaboration, since they were compact and according to my thesis supervisor did not provided enough depth for the analysis. Mrs. Graumann agreed to participate in the second part therefore, a time and date where set to have the interview. The day the second interview was conducted was the 28th of November at 10 a.m. Norwegian time, 11 a.m. Finnish time. Before the second interview was conducted, I went through her previous answers to focus on the questions that needed additional data. Moreover, I reviewed the analysis written of the in-depth interview in order, to be prepared and conduct the interview accordingly to the characteristics of this data collection method. The second interview was held through a Skype web call beforehand, I made a request to Mrs. Graumann to allow me

to record the call for professional purposes to which she agreed. During the interview the questions that needed elaboration were asked and the interviewee provided additional details to the answers that were received after the first interview. The interviewing process had duration of 16 minutes with 40 seconds after promptly thanking Mrs. Graumann she requested to have a copy of the final version of this thesis.

2.5 Data collection

Reviewing relevant literature and previous research the data for the theoretical framework was collected. In addition, journals, articles and websites were consulted in order to obtain enough data to define the core concepts of this research such as, social media and IMC. The theoretical framework provided the foundation of this research since, it is necessary to have information to support the findings from the theoretical chapter.

The data recollection technique that was used for the empirical part was an in-depth interview. This method was selected because the depth and rich data it can provide (Guerring et al. 2005) this could assist to analyze the information obtained for the case properly. The interview was in English, and it was done by e-mail, the option to have the first interview through other different platform was offered. The person interviewed was Mrs. Connie Graumann, part of the management of Off-Road Finnmark. There were ten different questions and were divided in three different groups each one was related to the research questions of this thesis. It was designed in this way so the information that was obtained through the interview could be relevant to the purpose of the thesis and the research questions as well. In addition, one more interview was made, the reason for this interview was because the answers obtained during the first interview were limited, and did not provide enough depth to complement the literature review and answer properly the research questions. Without enough information from the company a data analysis could not have been done properly and there would not be enough data to support the theory analysis hence the research questions would not have been answered properly. Due to these reasons a second interview was done, this time I interviewed Mrs. Graumann through a web call. The call was recorded, for professional purposes and the interviewee agreed to keep a record from the interview.

It was necessary to know what was the company's understanding about social media and the way it was been implemented in their marketing communications. This information assisted to develop a strategy that could help Off-Road Finnmark to implement social media in their marketing communications. Furthermore, the information that was obtained through the interview also assisted to point out the areas in which improvement was needed. The points for improvement were determined after analyzing the interview and verifying the usage of the different social media platforms the company uses. This was done also by using the information in the theoretical framework and in accordance to the different literature that was used for this report.

3 SOCIAL MEDIA

The concepts of social media and integrated marketing communications are defined here. This is done with the purpose to create the theoretical framework of this thesis work. In addition, the advantages and disadvantages of this tool are discussed including the discussions of how small and medium sized enterprises social media as a tool for their marketing strategies.

3.1 Social Media

Social media can be simply defined as the “media we use to be social” according to Safko (2010, 3). Safko (2010, 5) emphasizes the importance of knowing the tactics and strategies of the tools that are available for the users to connect with each other rather than just understanding the definition. Moreover, the author defines the concept “social” as the necessity of the human being to interact with others and “media” as the tools used to make those connections. Even though, human beings have been interacting and using different marketing methods throughout history, social media is more effective than the traditional methods because it offers a two-way communication. Furthermore, the author points out that this is not an immediate solution to company’s marketing issues but rather an efficient method to interact and develop relationships with their customers and prospects. (Safko 2010, 5.)

Hermkens, Kietzmann, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011, 241) propose that social media is a set of “highly interactive platforms” created through the usage of mobile and web-based technologies in which individuals and communities are able to share, develop, discuss, and modify content created by other users. In addition, the authors created a framework in which they explain social media using seven building blocks. The purpose of this framework is to create a clear view of social media, since according to Hermkens et al. (2011, 241), still firms do not fully comprehend how to employ or engage and learn from it, and do not know the different services available.

The seven building blocks are as follows: identity, conversations, presence, relationships, reputation, sharing, and groups. Hermkens et al. (2011, 242) provide a definition for the building blocks below:

- Identity: means the amount of personal information the users are willing to share in a social media environment.
- Conversations: represent the extent to which users communicate on a social media setting. Sharing: is the content that users, receive, distribute, and trade among themselves.
- Presence: represents the ability of the users to know when others are online.
- Relationships: are the levels in which the users are able to associate one with the other.
- Reputation: Represents how aware are the users of their standing and that of others in a social media setting.
- Groups: This building block represents the ability of users to create communities and sub-communities. According to what certain site wants to accomplish, there will be a different focus on which building blocks are going to be developed further.

Figure 2 below illustrates how the building blocks are arranged according to their functionality.

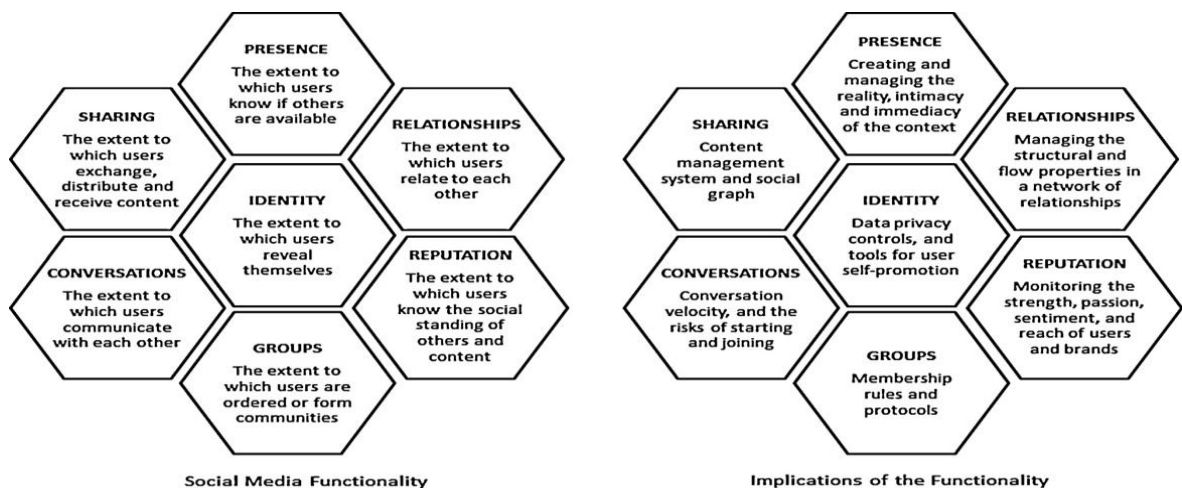


Figure 2. The honeycomb of social media (Hermkens et al. 2011, 243)

Another approach is provided by Dann and Dann (2011, 344) who define the concept as the “interconnection between content, users and communication technologies”. Moreover, the reason social media has become an important trend setter on the internet it is because of the natural need of people to connect with others. This approach follows the ideal that the online community concentrates on virtual presence and virtual geography, in which geography is the middle point that connects users with each other. Furthermore, social media has three interconnected characteristics which must be available in order for a setting to be working properly online, these characteristics are: communications media, content and social interaction. Communications media can be define as the foundation that enables content sharing and social interaction among the users. Content is what motivates the individual to visit certain social media environment; it can be photos, music, social news or videos. Finally, social interaction is the connection one user can have with others through one of the different social media services.

The three elements have to be available in order for a social media setting to work properly, in the following figure the interaction among the components is illustrated (Dann & Dann 2011, 344.):

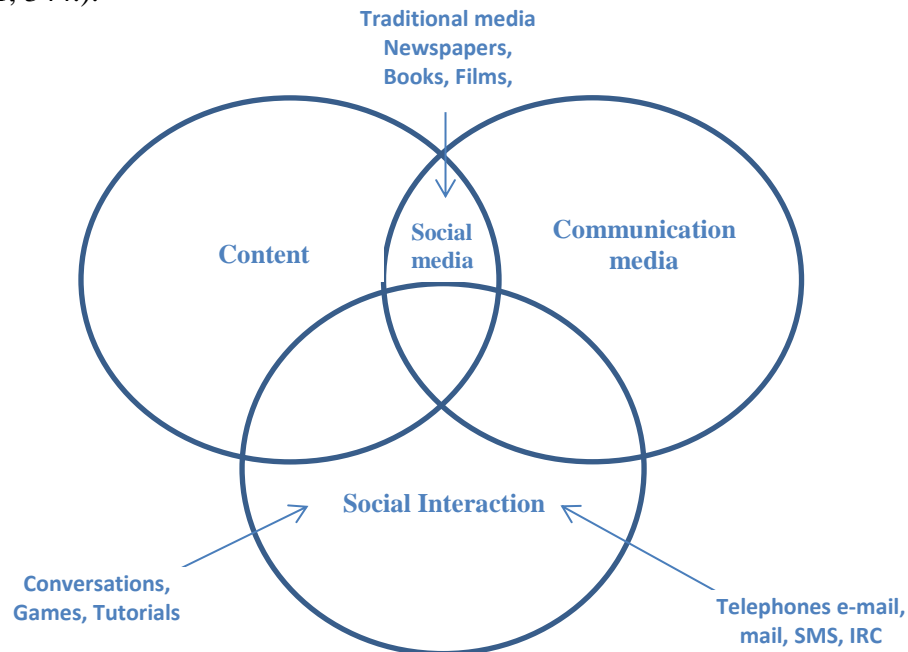


Figure 3. Social media components (Dann & Dann 2011, 345)

A similar approach in which social media is divided into three different elements is offered by Ahlqvist et al. (2010, 4). The elements that are used to explain social media are as follows: content, communities and web 2.0. The first element content is defined as the media created by the user that is going to be shared in a social media setting. Communities refer to one of the main aspects of social media, which is the interaction between the users. Finally, web 2.0 is the technologies used to create content and that enable the users to interact with each other. (Ahlqvist et al. 2010, 4.)

The perspectives and definitions provided by different authors may have some similarities but at the same time each one has its unique approach to explain this technology. Social media can provide a different approach than the traditional marketing, since nowadays traditional marketing methods in which the main purpose was only to offer products and services and sell them do not have a positive acceptance anymore. (Karahan & Kazim Kirtis 2010, 261). Meerman Scott (2010, 39) suggests that the web can be compared to an everyday city and social media to a cocktail party. The author offers this explanation because although it is possible to perform business through this platform, it is more important to create long lasting relationships and friendships rather than just trying to offer a product or a service. Usually when a company just tries to sell or offer something through any social media setting, they will get a negative response from the audience since this is not the right approach. Therefore, firms need to have a clear perspective or how to approach social media, understand the weak and strong points, so they could benefit from this tool and take advantage of the benefits in can offer. (Meerman Scott 2010, 39.)

3.2 Advantages and disadvantages of social media

Social media, like every other technology has its own strong and weak points, and these points can determine how it can be used and what can offer to certain company. It has been discussed earlier that one strong point of social media was the ability to connect with existing and potential customers and to offer them a two-way communication (Safko 2010, 5). Below the advantages of social media are discussed in addition, to different examples to give a perspective of the benefits it can provide to ORF. Based on previous experience working with the ORF and their situation regarding personnel and resources, the following

advantages of social media can be a motivation to continue or increase the implementation of this tool.

3.2.1 Advantages of social media

Safko (2010, 5) pointed out that social media provides a two-way communication system and this can provide a good amount of feedback to the companies, because they can listen what their customers really want and what they expect from the organization. The author employs the phrase “A Fundamental Shift in Power”, which he explains as a “change from pontification to two-way communications”, basically is a change in which customers no longer are willing to listen to traditional advertisement, they want to get information from a source they can trust (Safko 2010, 5.) Social media can assist firms to build credibility among their customers or potential customers. Safko (2010, 6-7) discusses is that it is possible to connect with big groups of people in short amounts of time. Word of mouth according to the author can be a very useful tool, but companies should always work to keep a positive impression among their customers, to benefit and create a positive image of themselves. There is an emphasis on this advantage because this can go either way, and create a very good image for the company or a really bad name. The author uses the example of United Airlines which mishandled the baggage of one of their customers which happened to be a famous country singer from the USA, Dave Carroll. The customer did not receive any assistance when he noticed that the bag where his guitar was being mishandled. Due to the negligence of the employees, the guitar was broken. As a protest the singer released a video through Youtube.com explaining what happened. The video got a huge amount of views in a short period of time consequently, damaging the image of the company and generating negative feedback. (Safko 2010, 6-7.)

Word of mouth is not a negative aspect of social media, as it can prove to be quite useful. Molenaar (2012, 226) stresses, that companies should develop their social media marketing strategy utilizing the “customer’s support and customer’s conversation (word of mouth) about their brand, products or services”. Moreover, Meerman Scott (2010, 40-41) provides the example of Mr. Andrew Peters, Asia Pacific regional director of the Pacific West communications, was in charge of the marketing of the 1st Annual Singapore Tattoo Show.

The expectation for the first year of this show was 5,000 assistants but through the effective use of social media, he managed to create a snow ball effect and over 15,000 people managed to assist to the event. This can prove that word of mouth can generate interest properly for a brand, product or in this case event when used properly and providing a positive image of the organization creating this event. An important part of Peters' strategy was to create a Facebook site about regional tattoo art, artists and some details about the event instead of focusing only about the convention. This group was named Tattoo Artistry, and proved to be the right choice since it could attract more users regardless of the event itself. Through this site he managed to create a community and create awareness about the event. Perhaps not all of the users were able to assist to the event, but through word of mouth more users managed to know the group and the 1st Annual Singapore Tattoo Show. (Meerman Scott 2010, 40-41.)

The next advantage to be discussed is that social media can provide a space to market a company or product without spending considerable amounts of money. In the example provided by Meerman Scott (2010, 40-41) in which Mr. Andrew Peters managed to create the group and generate attention for the 1st Annual Singapore Tattoo Show, no resources were used for media or advertising. Da Silva (2012) and Sandilands (2012) agree that social media is a cost effective service, an example is that the most used settings such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn are free to join making them a viable option for companies to interact with their customers. Even though, organizations need to be careful with which approach they have in those sites, because users do not want to be harassed or spammed by offers when they are using these platforms. Having the opportunity to interact with their users, and be able to provide solutions to their issues or answer their questions can generate a positive image of the company among the community.

Additionally, Da Silva (2012) proposes that social media can create brand value however, the author explains that in order to do this properly the data that is going to be shared has to be rich and compelling in order to generate interest. Moreover, Gunelius (2011) suggests that if companies wish to create awareness, they need to follow a few steps. The first one, is to select which social media setting they will approach, i.e. which site they will work with. When they are able to choose which environment will generate more benefits for them they

need to provide useful data that can draw attention from their users and motivate them to share it with their audiences. This can generate more ways customers can find the company's social media setting and give them higher rankings in web based search engines. (Gunelius 2011.)

Gunelius (2011) gives the following example: “if a company has ten different web pages of data there are ten different ways for users to find them hence if organizations manage to add a blog and upload a post on a daily basis that will provide now 365 different ways in which their site can be found”. This can be called the compounding effect of blogging. The next step is to locate your target then organizations can conduct a search through any search engine using the words that usually customers would use to try to find companies that offer similar products or services. Following those paths users go through, it would be possible to find which sites, forums or blogs they frequent. Firms should register in the relevant forums and/or blogs and interact with the users through posts, answering questions or by publishing comments. This can create the perception that the company is interested in assisting their customers and not only trying to market their products or services, creating interest and generating the possibility to attract users to their main social media setting. In addition, is important to identify and interact with the influencers of those communities where users interact, this can be done by posting on their blogs, follow them on a social media setting, for example Twitter, or if possible provide some data about the company through an email. This can create awareness in them and in their audience. Finally, companies need to understand that in order to achieve success in this environment they need to develop lasting relations with their audience and generate the perception they can be dependable. Gunelius (2011) implies that patience is important since this is not a short term solution, but rather a long term plan that can provide stable, organic growth through consistent and perseverant interaction. In addition, the author discusses that companies should follow the 80-20 approach, which means that during 80% of their time they should perform non-promotional activities and 20% trying to promote what they have to offer. Creating a brand name is a positive aspect for a company and one that can be developed with time that can provide growth to a business. (Gunelius 2011.)

Some social media sites provide web analytics with the use of this tool companies are able to obtain rich data such as user trends and demographic data (Poirier 2011). This valuable information can assist companies to develop their marketing campaigns effectively, since they are aware what type of advertising is generating more interest from the users. In addition, the feedback organizations can obtain from the analytics can provide different perspectives on how to improve their service or product. (Poirier 2011.)

The aforementioned advantages can provide Off-Road Finnmark an introduction of what social media can do for the marketing of their event. It is necessary for the company to receive feedback from potential and actual customers, to make it possible for them to be aware which can be the approach they can use to develop their race further and effectively. This platform can provide the organization the exposure they need, since from my previous experience working for them I learned that they are interested in generating more interest in other markets. Even though, the company itself does not wish to grow, at least their desire is to have more participants, and one of the objectives of this thesis work is to assist them to reach out to more prospects.

Understanding that some of these advantages need time to put in practice can be the first step for Off-Road Finnmark. This could lead to an increase in the implementation of this tool and the company could obtain benefits from adopting social media to their marketing communications. Still, the company needs to be aware that as social media can have pros there are cons that need to be considered in order to avoid any downfalls or misuses.

3.2.2 Disadvantages of Social Media

It was discussed early that Safko (2010, 4) argues that social media is not a miraculous solution to a company's marketing issues. The reason for this argument is the fact that one disadvantage of social media is that it can be time consuming. Companies need to dedicate enough time in order to achieve the results they are seeking. Sandilands (2012) points out that marketing a product or service through social media is a constant work and the need to find new perspectives to reach out to costumers can be time consuming. This means that is not enough for companies to just create a fan page in Facebook or tweet a few times per

day in Twitter and expect that prospects will find them or follow them. There needs to be regular updating in the database of the company so fresh new information can be available to the users. That can generate a feeling in the customers that the company is available and is possible to interact or listen to them. Time is an important resource for organizations and sometimes it can be a resource that is not always available in great amounts so special care needs to be taken so that the right amount of work is putted on developing their social media environment. Sandilands (2012.)

Another obstacle that organizations could face when trying to establish themselves in any social media setting is the lack of understanding to which approach to use. It is possible to use the example provided by Meerman Scott (2010, 39-40) which was discussed earlier, that compares social media with a cocktail party. Firms cannot just come straight to the users and talk about their business this will create discontent among them and make them avoid further contact with the company. It is important to know how to operate within any social media environment since there is a great amount of competition. Debono (2012) suggests that companies need to develop a set of objectives, in order to know how they wish to establish themselves in this environment. Having a clear perspective on how to approach this environment can assist to achieve success according to the author (Debono 2012). In addition, Pitta (2010) arguments that there can be a loss in the control of the message delivered through social media.

Privacy can be another problem, since sensitive data is being recorded by social media site and users are not always are aware which information is saved and with what purposes is being used (Heyman & Pierson 2011, 32-33). The authors point out that a notion of the user being disempowered to control their social media experience can be created and in addition, some users do not want their information to be used to generate customized advertising (Heyman & Pierson, 2011, 32-33). Poirier (2012) points out that even though, users agree to share their information when they accept to the end user agreement, a debate exists to prove whether this practice is ethical or unethical. Companies using this data and generating this custom marketing ads according to the users information, might be perceived as if they are invading the user's personal space and can create bad reputation for them (Barnes 2006; Meerman Scott 2010). Businesses should avoid any situation that could

create a negative image among customers and prospects, because it can damage any marketing strategy they could try to develop.

Pitta (2010) points out that another possible disadvantage in using social media as a marketing tool is that there are no proper ways to measure the effect of brand awareness and usage. It was discussed previously that there was a possibility to use analytics to obtain demographic data and user trends, but is not possible to evaluate what is the brand perception by the users. The lack of this type of metrics can create difficulties to a business that wants to learn how deep the brand perception is among customers and if further changes in their strategies are needed. This can prove to be an obstacle for companies since they cannot assume that brand awareness has been accomplished if there is not a true way to measure that metric. Pitta (2010.)

Furthermore, Christodoulides, Michaelidou and Siamagka (2011, 1153) point out the adoption of new technologies such as social media, can be related to innovativeness of the organization or from the upper management. The authors claim that the adoption process within a company can be affected by different factors, which can be both internal and external. Such factors can be unfamiliarity with the particular technology, not enough resources for the process, or a negative perspective about the effectiveness of that tool (Christodoulides et al. 2011, 1154). Furthermore, Frambach and Schillewaert (2002, 10) propose that a company size and innovativeness determine the adoption process. The authors discuss that larger corporations tend to adopt innovations to support their current activities. On the other hand, smaller corporations tend to be more entrepreneurs and are more receptive towards any new tools available. Implementing a new technology, in this case social media depends on the resources a company is capable to use not only on the size of the enterprise. (Frambach & Schillewaert 2002, 10.)

Social media does have its shortcomings and barriers but these are not plenty. Since social media had its boom most of the problems that existed had been understood. Even though, there are few barriers or cons regarding the usage of social media, companies still need to pay attention, so all their planning and strategy does not stalls or stagnates due to any of these problems. For the case company, Off-Road Finnmark it would be necessary to plan

and organize the resources available so this tool can be implemented in their marketing communications effectively. One particular barrier authors tend to stress about is the amount of resources the company is willing to accommodate in order to employ social media, most specifically time. In my opinion the company needs to pay attention in particular to this point, because from the material that was reviewed this could be something that can prevent a proper implementation of the tool. Besides employing the right amount of time can assist to develop the proper understanding of this service and to generate the needed proficiencies to use it effectively.

3.3 Use of Social media by small and medium enterprises

Companies are looking for new methods to interact with their customers and social media is able to provide a platform to develop relationships with their customers (Safko 2010; Meerman Scott 2010, 39). Heller Baird and Parasnis (2011, 3) point out that 70 % of the companies interviewed in their research, contemplate that customers will have a perception they are old fashioned if they do not have a social media site, 67% speculate that is needed to attract better employees, and 58% considers that their competition is reaching out successfully customers through social media. This can give a view of the importance social media has acquired over the last years, furthermore, another example is provided by Christodoulides et al. (2011, 1153). Who point out, that another motivation for organizations to use social media is that 93% of social media users consider that firms should have a social network site. In addition, 85% discuss that companies should interact with them through social networking services. (Christodoulides et al. 2011, 1153). These statistics provide a brief introduction and shows the importance social media is obtaining. It is necessary to remember that social media is a complementary tool (Safko 2010, 5), and companies should not abandon their other marketing efforts (Evans 2008, 32).

As it was discussed previously businesses are using social media to try to reach out to their customers, nowadays users do not want the old fashioned intrusive advertising (Meerman Scott 2010, 39; Evans 2008, 33). Companies are trying new strategies, such as recurring to marketing companies specialized in social media, in order to get a custom made strategy that will fit to the company's specific needs (De Kare- Silver 2011, 53). In addition, the

author points out that this type of agencies is assisting companies to adopt new marketing methods and to leave behind the old fashioned marketing techniques. The example of Virgin Atlantic is provided by De Kare-Silver, the marketing chief of the company Alison Wightman contacted the agency Qubemedia. Their request was to obtain data on the activities of their competition, to increase their understanding about any new marketing methods and how to allocate their budget efficiently (De Kare- Silver 2011, 54). This is one approach some companies are following in order to try to understand the new ways to market a business (Hermkens et al. 2011, 250).

There are different ways companies can interact with their customers, the following figure depicts how small and medium enterprises interact with their customers (Heller Baird & Parasnis 2011, 4):

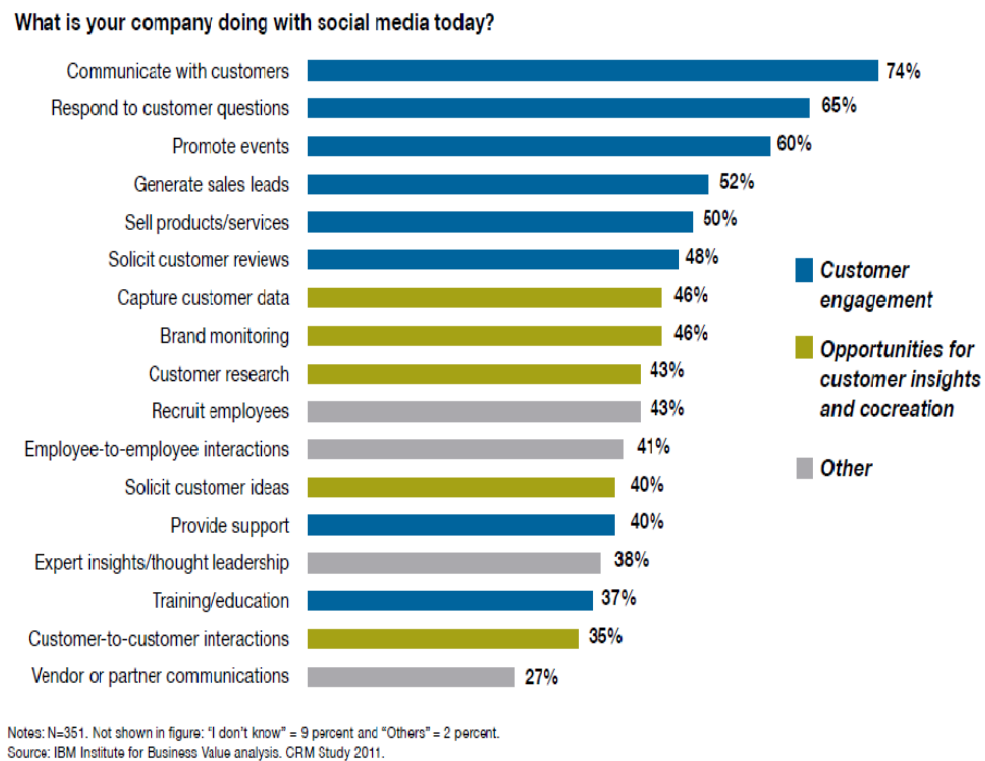


Figure 3. Social media usage by small and medium enterprises (Heller Baird & Parasnis 2011, 4)

Social media has affected the way business to business, b2b, companies behave as well. These companies were not that active regarding the usage of social media, but nowadays around 76% have a site in one social media platform (Heller Bair & Parasnis, 2011). According to the findings from Christodoulides et al. (2011, 1155) 77% of the b2b firms have a Facebook account which they use to meet their targets. The authors, argument that these businesses have recognized the importance of social media, and established that attracting new customers and developing business relationships as their main objective when using this tool. In addition, they point out that the first step in order to generate attention in the market for a brand is to establish brand awareness. (Christodoulides et al. 2011, 1156.) Social media has become a reliable platform that is generating attention from different type of companies, in this case b2b that have started to integrate this tool consistently to their marketing strategy.

Even though, social media is more about interacting than selling (Evans 2008, 36) some organizations have found the way to integrate their shops within their social media platforms. De Kare-Silver (2011, 55-56) provides the example of JC Penney, an American retail store that integrated an e-commerce site to their social media interface. JC Penney's Facebook page had 1.3 million registered users, furthermore, those users have the opportunity to give feedback about the products, comment and give recommendations to their friends while they browse through the site. This integrated shop counts with different departments each offering a different set of products to the users. Each product a customer visits has the option to leave a comment, a Share button so it can be posted on their own Facebook site and a Like button as well. The company linked this site to Google analytics, in order to be able to analyze their return of investment by tracking the metrics of the site, marketing campaigns and conversions (De Kare-Silver 2011, 55-56.)

Heller Baird and Parasnis (2011, 33) provide another example of a company integrating a "shop" on their Facebook site; in this case it was Delta Airlines. They provided the opportunity to customers to book tickets without having to leave the social media interface. (Heller Baird & Parasnis 2011, 33). Faulds and Mangold (2009, 358) argument, that more companies are adopting new stratagems for their IMC, thus motivating organizations to employ new ways to interact with their customers. Qualman (2010, 222) points out that

customers enjoy the practicality of one stop shopping and being able to perform different activities on one site. De Karen-Silver (2011, 57) adds that companies are employing more the one stop shopping service and are taking advantage of the fact that more people want to buy where they connect with others. Hence developing the term “social shopping, which the author argument has the potential to change the way organizations perform business online (De Karen-Silver 2011, 57).

Social media is little by little attracting more the attention of business (Figure 4), and they are trying to adapt this tool to their current strategy. This platform is not here to replace all the tools used by a company (Evans 2008, 32-33) but to be a complement for those. Companies will keep on trying to find different ways to use social media in order to reach out and interact with their users.



Figure 4. Google search trends for social media (Christodoulides et al. 2011, 1157)

3.4 Integrated marketing communications

Integrated marketing communication (henceforth IMC) started to obtain worldwide recognition and importance during the 1990s (Holm 2006 24; Gurau 2008, 170). Prakash and Sharma (2010, 601) argue that there are different perspectives to define this term and that each one provides its own unique insight. However, even if there is not a set definition, a group of authors agree that one of the main benefits of using this tool is the generation of synergy (Gurau 2008, 171; Prasad & Sethi 2010, 601; Lynagh & Pitta & Weisgal 2006, 156). Today integrated marketing communications has become an important marketing trend and integral part for marketing processes and corporate communications (Pollock

2012). In the following paragraphs several definitions and approaches of IMC will be provided to understand more this marketing concept.

Holm (2006, 25-26) quotes Smith et al. (1999) who provide three definitions for IMC. The first definition arguments that there has to be a total control and management of a firm's marketing communications. Secondly, verify that the brand positioning, message, and character are being delivered synergistically through every communication platform and are directed from a single constant strategy. Finally, the strategic analysis, selection, employment and management of all the parts of marketing communications in which the proper use of resources, cutting costs and achieving maximum results can influence the business between a firm and its actual and future customers.

Similarly, to the third definition provided by Holm (2006, 25-26), Prasad and Sethi (2010, 601) define IMC as the strategic coordination of different promotional activities such as advertisement, public relations, and sales promotion in order to achieve the goal of providing the optimal results through their marketing communications. Furthermore, Baker and Hart (2007, 330) quote Smith (1996) who defines IMC as a simple concept. Smith discusses that IMC brings all the available forms of communications and converts them into a continuous flow of solutions. To finalize, he proposes that at its most basic level IMC groups all the promotion elements in order to make them work in harmony (Baker & Hart 2007, 330.) The previous authors have certain similarities in the way they want to define IMC, especially in the approach they have, which is that the effective combination of different tools or elements can lead to achieve maximum results.

In order to provide a deep understanding of IMC Holm (2006, 25) references the tool developed by Smith et al. (1999) in which marketing integration happens from one to seven different levels. On the first level is the vertical objectives integration, when communication objectives fit with marketing objectives and the overall firm's objectives. Secondly, horizontal/frontal integration, marketing communications duties fit properly with other business functions from manufacturing, human resource and operations management. The next level is the marketing mix integration, the marketing mix decisions of the price, place and product are homogenous with the promotion choices. The fourth step of the tool

is the communication mix strategy, proposes that the 12 communication tools are a guide for the customer through every stage of the purchasing process and they all depict consistent message. The fifth level is the creative design integration, which is constant and homogenous with the selected positioning of the product. The sixth level is the external/internal integration, which can be defined as the collaboration between the internal departments and the external agencies over an agreed strategy and plan. Finally, the last step is the financial integration which is the efficient use of the budget in order to assure that a long term investment is optimized and that economies of scale are achieved. (Holm 2006, 25.)

Holm (2006, 25) quoting Smith et al. (1999) argument that the most important level of this tool is the first level, vertical objectives integration, because there cannot be an effective marketing communication strategy if there are no objectives or objectives formulated previously by the organization. This tool can give a perspective on how to organize a company's marketing communications, and which steps are essential in order to develop a marketing plan. However, Holm (2006, 25) stresses that there are complications within the steps of this concept and that the main issue is to secure that the objectives in every level are mutually achievable. Even though, it has its flaws, this concept can provide understanding about how to develop marketing communications. Those complications that exist are considerations that need to be taken care in order to deliver an effective strategy.

The tool developed by Smith et al. (1999) can assist Off-Road Finnmark, to understand how their marketing strategy can be developed and to be able to identify the objectives through every of their management levels. Prakash and Sharma (2010, 372) agrees with the tool, they point out that there has to be a coordination among the different management levels, strategies, messages and with the usage of the business' resources in order to engage in a compressively and significantly with prospects and clients. A properly developed IMC can influence targets that where once out of reach for companies (Lynagh & Pitta & Weisgal 2006, 156). Since the idea of the company, from my previous experience working with them, is to internationalize their event, developing consciously their strategy can provide a perspective on how to accomplish their goal.

4 DATA ANALYSIS AND STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

An analysis of the data obtained from the interview with Mrs. Connie Graumann is provided below. Moreover, a strategy for Off-Road Finnmark to integrate social media in their marketing communications is introduced, and a plan to implement the strategy is provided here.

4.1 Data analysis

It was discussed previously that the information that was obtained during the data collection process through the two interviews with Mrs. Connie Graumann, the administrative manager from ORF. The interview was divided into two parts because the information gathered during the first interview needed some elaboration. The first interview was done via email furthermore, the second interview with Mrs. Graumann was conducted via a web call on Skype. Along with the literature and previous research discussed previously, the data obtained from the two interviews helped to achieve the objectives of the research questions from this project. In addition, a strategy was designed for ORF to assist them to continue implementing social media within their IMC.

The first research question is as follows: What is the role of social media in integrated marketing communications? This question was answered using the data collected in chapter three the theoretical framework of this thesis. Social media and integrated marketing communications are defined in order to support the objectives of this research work. While discussing social media and its advantages and disadvantages, both were focused on the implementation and how to avoid possible setbacks while trying to employ this tool. Since the first question focus on the role of social media within an IMC therefore, information discussing how to continue utilizing social media was necessary. It is necessary to consider that can exist during the process of adopting a new tool. Another point that can be taken into consideration to answer the first research question is one of the advantages of social media given by Safko (2010, 5) argumenting that word of mouth is a powerful tool that can generate attention to certain product, service or person. Since the first research question addresses the role of social media in an IMC therefore, word of

mouth could become an important aspect of a company's social media marketing strategy (Molenaar 2012, 226). Furthermore, one of ORF's intentions is to generate more awareness about the race consequently, social media can provide a platform to reach out to more potential customers. The example provided by Meerman Scott (2010, 40) discussed earlier, about the 1st Annual Singapore Tattoo Show can be another argument for social media to have a stronger presence in an IMC moreover, in ORF's marketing strategy.

The second research question of this thesis is focused on how the Off-Road Finnmark can integrate social media in their marketing communications. The data used to answer this research question was obtained through the empirical part of the research which two in-depth interviews. The interview was divided in two parts, the first was performed in email and the second one was a web call through Skype. Both interviews were recorded, transcribed and documented in the Appendices of this thesis. The answers from both interviews were analyzed and compared, in order to verify if there were any discrepancies between the answers of the first and second interview. The first three interview questions focus on the role of social media in an IMC. Based in the answers that Mrs. Graumann provided during the interview, ORF have an understanding of what social media is and she considers that this tool can become an important part of their IMC. After going through the answers Mrs. Graumann provided, I found out that the company is in fact using social media but not as effectively as it supposed to be. Based on Mrs. Graumann's answer social media is defined as "a way for Off-Road Finnmark to interact with their sponsors, racers, volunteers and other potential interested parts". At the moment the company has a presence in three different platforms. These are Facebook, Blogger and Youtube but the company seems to be only active in just one Facebook. I verified their Blogger website and throughout this year the company managed to post only seven times, and there was only one commentary.

Maintaining a blog can be time consuming and require a great amount of dedication (Safko 2010, 146) but can be an effective way for the company to listen to their audience and interact directly with them (Meerman Scott 2010, 59). By listening and interacting with their audience the company can comprehend what are their visitor's interests, questions, and perceptions are. This data can be employed to add content of the blog that could attract

more visits (Meerman Scott 2010, 58) therefore, creating more awareness about the race. On the other hand, while visiting their Youtube account I observed that only two videos have been posted throughout the year. This is not necessarily a negative aspect because, unlike blogging video sharing is not an activity that could require a great amount of neither time nor dedication. The focus of video sharing is to generate the right idea and to try to be innovative (Meerman Scott 2010, 75-79; Safko 2010, 243-246).

Meerman Scott (2010, 77-79) provides the example of Tourism Queensland in Australia. The author discussed that the tourism bureau created a contest in order to hire one employee to what they called, the “best job in the world”; the job consisted in being the caretaker of the Islands of the Great Barrier Reef and providing data about the region in different social media platforms. To participate in the contest, the interested prospects had to create a video in which they provided argument why they should be chosen as the caretakers. This competition created a great amount of attention and interest for the area, over 30,000 videos were received and the goal the Queensland bureau of tourism had of 400,000 for their website was accomplished within two days. Furthermore, the author stresses that although not every project can provide the same results however, creativity, perseverance and offering an added bonus to the participant can lead to new projects. (Meerman Scott 2010, 78-79.) Similarly, Safko (2010, 244-245) arguments that there is no “exact recipe” to achieve success through video sharing, but it is more about “just doing it and give it a try”.

It is understandable that ORF may not have enough resources, such as time or personnel, to be active in every platform. However, if it is not possible to actively participate in multiple social media platforms, ORF should channel their efforts in a single social media setting. Meerman Scott (2010, 189) has a particular approach, he uses the phrase “You can’t go to every party, so why even try”. The author uses the metaphor in which social media is a cocktail party, where he discusses that it is impossible to attend to every single party. Even though, there is the possibility to attend a few parties, it is not possible to have a conversation with everyone present. The author implies with this metaphor that, while working with different social media platforms it is necessary to understand which one is the one that fits the needs and may be able to help you to achieve certain goals. Meerman Scott (2010, 189.)

Meerman Scott (2010, 189-190) arguments that it is necessary to try different services, but ultimately it is better to use the ones that can provide the tools that can help the company. Through the following questions “Where do you want to be? and Where can you be most helpful?” the author wants to create an understanding of which platform could be selected to work with (Meerman Scott 2010, 190). This example can give a perspective on why is advisable for the case company too to focus on a few or a single platform rather than trying to have a presence in every single one. It can be counterproductive and can create a perception in the users that the company is not active therefore, creating a negative impression on the general populace (Meerman Scott 2010, 48-49). Based on my interview with Mrs. Connie Graumann, the company is aware of that is difficult to remain active in every social media setting they use and ORF is analyzing which platforms they should consider.

The next research question focuses on how Off-Road Finnmark’s IMC can assist them to achieve their objectives. This question was answered with the data obtained from the remaining questions of the interview i.e. questions 4, 5, 6, and 7. In total there were seven questions but my thesis supervisor, Mr. Okuogume suggested to divide question 4 in two simple questions to avoid any confusion during the interview process.

Based on the results of this set of questions, the company is willing to increase their usage of social media within their IMC. Mrs. Graumann proposed that the company needs to be increasingly active within their social media platforms. In addition, she pointed out that additional information in English will be provided to international riders through Facebook since all of the data is in Norwegian. The reason this has not been done before is due to the lack of demand because, there have not been any previous requests to have posts in English based on her experience. The increase in activity and data available can assist to increase interaction (Safko 2010, 5) with other international riders. The company would like to include advertisement in their Facebook page since, this can generate more awareness about the race. The next question is about the development of proficiencies in order to efficiently use social media. Mrs. Graumann proposed that in order to develop additional more resources, such as time and money are needed. Furthermore, she added that is

important to know where to find potential customers hence social media can be a gateway for ORF to reach out were possible customers (Meerman Scott 2010, 36). Identifying where customers or potential customers are, can help the company not spend additional resources and interact with an increased number of people. A solid plan and the proper strategy can provide benefits for the business (Evans 2008, 154).

Mrs. Graumann provided information about the current IMC strategy for Off-Road Finnmark. She proposed that it was divided into two parts, i.e. Plan A and Plan B. Plan A consists in describing how the work should be done. This describes the activities that the company has to follow. Part B is the working part of the plan; and Plan B is focused on the information that is released about the company and the race. In this part of the plan the data which is released to the local and internal press is selected and the advertisement that is going to be used for the local media is selected too. Mrs. Graumann pointed out that the most important marketing tool to market the ORF race in foreign markets is through the international racers that participate in the event. Since, they become the company's ambassadors in their home countries after participating in the race. She elaborated further by providing the example of a group of Swedish participants that attended one of the races. In addition, to completing the race they distributed advertisement provided by ORF, about the event in their home country. Furthermore, she pointed out that they try to obtain additional data from the riders outside of Norway that participate in the race such as, details about the cycling magazines available in their area in order to create possible contacts and distribute advertisement about the ORF race. Based on the interview, the company has developed creative ways to keep in touch with the people that participate in the race and collaborate with them to create awareness about the race in their local markets. ORF has been benefiting from the usage of word of mouth, and the organization has been working to build a positive perception about Off-Road Finnmark and the race.

The next two questions focus if the integration of social media in ORF's IMC could assist them to achieve their objectives. It was discussed previously that the company are trying to be active in social media platforms and through this media they have tried to connect with their former and new riders. Off-Road Finnmark considers social media as an important tool that can provide benefits regarding their marketing efforts. With the aid of this tool,

they have had the opportunity to communicate and cooperate more effectively with the racers that participated previously. The company has managed to find a way to overcome their limitations and try to generate more interest and create awareness about the race outside Norway.

4.2 Strategy development

The data that was obtained from the two in-depth interviews provided a clear perspective of what the company's purposes and objectives regarding social media and their IMC are. As it was discussed during the data analysis part of this chapter, the company has already started to employ social media as a tool for their IMC thus, providing enough background information to develop a strategy that fits the company needs.

According to Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004, 2) the role of the customer has changed since, buyers are increasingly participative, prepared and knowledgeable. Meerman Scott (2010, 120) emphasizes on focusing in the customers instead of only on the product or service a company offers even though, this process may be difficult for the marketers it can prove to be useful (Meerman Scott 2010, 120). Furthermore, organizations should offer something of value to the customers that can enable them to solve a problem or that can assist them to achieve their objectives (Parolini 1999, 60; Sterne 1999, 232). A company should focus on their customers and their organizational objectives in order to effectively market themselves online (Meerman Scott 2010, 120-121).

Off-Road Finnmark has set their organizational objectives therefore, it is necessary to focus on their customers or potential customers. Understanding what ORF can offer to their customers or what their needs are should be researched. ORF is not only offering a race but could also offer a new experience, the opportunity to do plenty of exercise, relax, or even promote what Alta has to offer to the visitors coming for the race. This is a brief example, but it is important for the company to focus on their customers and understand their own objectives and thereby the possibility to create compelling material over the web to connect with them can be done (Meerman Scott 2010, 120).

The next step would be to set the organizational objectives of Off-Road Finnmark. From my previous experience the public relations (henceforth PR) and marketing plans where to increase the awareness about the race and attract additional people outside Norway to participate in the race. Having set the business objectives was important because, they form the foundations for the social media campaign (Evans 2008, 320) of the company. Meerman Scott (2010, 121) argues that it is important to “align” the marketing and PR plan with the objectives from other departments in a company. This can provide the opportunity to focus and channel the resources through the right path. When this is accomplished, it is possible to start gathering information about the target audience for the social media plan.

As it is important for Off-Road Finnmark to set their objectives straight, it is as well important to have a clear picture of which audience is the most interesting for the company (Evans 2008, 321). Meerman Scott (2010, 122) points out the importance of buyer personas, a representation of a customer type that has been identified to have interest in certain organization or product. Furthermore, the author suggests that for a PR or marketing plan to be successful is important to identify one or two buyer personas, and this term has to be included in the planning process. The author provides the example of the presidential elections of United States in 2004. The marketing groups for the two main candidates segmented the potential voters into several different buyer personas. This helped to create customized marketing ad campaigns to each buyer persona group. (Meerman Scott, 122.) Off-Road Finnmark could follow a similar strategy, first segmentating their existing and potential customers and dividing them into different buyer personas. This can assist the company to develop a proper strategy for each group, hence generating increased interest and/or participation in the race.

When every buyer persona has been identified, the next step is to analyze every group and ask the following questions: “Who are you?” and What is the company portraying? (Safko 2010, 679). Furthermore, the author suggests that the following questions need to be answered for every buyer persona: “What is the description for the buyer persona? (For each), who is your persona? (For each), what is your style? (For each), what is your message? (For each), what is your frequency? (For each), what is your call to action (conversion)? (For each)”. Safko (2010, 679) proposes that the company’s persona is

important, as it is the perception that this gives to the general public. In order to avoid damaging Off-Road Finnmark's perception it is recommended to have the following attributes, i.e. transparency, authenticity and honesty when participating in any online interaction. Each buying persona demands a different communication style and approach so it is recommended to choose wisely the behavior that it is going to use with every particular group. (Safko 2010, 679.) Off-Road Finnmark needs to understand how to deal with every different buyer persona that is interested in the race; this will create an improved perception from each group thus giving the possibility to generate more interest for the event.

The aforementioned steps can assist the case company to develop their strategy according to their aims and needs. Every step needs to be understood and analyzed properly in order to develop an IMC strategy that can provide Off-Road Finnmark the possibility to achieve their objectives. With a strong strategy the company can overcome the potential limitations they could have and can reach out to more potential customers. The reason these steps were developed during this part of the chapter it is because, based on the answers of the interview, the company has a clear set of objectives hence these steps could provide support to the development of their IMC. Understanding and setting their own objectives and segmenting their customers, can lead to the development of different strategies that could attract potential customers from different sectors. Furthermore, they can provide a market research that Off-Road Finnmark could use for future purposes and additional strategy development.

4.3 Strategy Implementation

The previous two chapters provided information about the Off-Road Finnmark's involvement and understanding of social media, and the development of the company's IMC plan. Dann and Dann (2011, 280) define implementation as the combination of objectives, plans and strategies with the amount of work that will take to properly apply them. Furthermore, the author proposes that there are two important activities that are required before engaging in the final steps of the implementation of the strategy. Similarly, to the strategy development chapter, it is necessary to revisit the company's original plans and what needs to be accomplished and how social media can fit in the organization's

objectives. This is done with the purpose to verify if the objectives are measurable and if the marketing metrics can analyze the data collected to prove if there was failure or success. Secondly, before continuing with the implementation process it is important to verify what if there has been a proper interpretation and assessment of the “product-market fit”. This involves an investigation of how the product is perceived by the general populace and if any corresponding changes are needed prior to developing any strategies in order to increase its effectiveness. (Dann & Dann 2011, 280.)

These steps can provide data about how the product is perceived and a clear view if it will be possible to measure the success or failure of the strategy. Safko (2010, 723) proposes that in order to measure the success of the company’s strategy, there has to be certain measurement tools. It is important to have a measurement process that helps avoid any unnecessary data while doing market research thus giving the possibility to improve the decision making ability of companies regarding marketing (Sheehan 2010, 140).

Furthermore, it is pointed out that all of web analytics start when the business and/or marketing objectives of a company are aligned with what needs to be measured over the web (Sheehan 2010, 140). Sheehan (2010, 140) argues that if the marketing strategy and objectives have been set, it would be easy to focus on the web metrics that are important for a company. The measurements that are aligned directly with the company’s objectives are named key performance indicators, henceforth KPIs. Due to the difficulty to identify which KPIs to track, the agency Razorfish in collaboration with TNS Cymfony/Keller Fay Group developed a system called social influence marketing score (henceforth SIM score). This score system looks after a brand’s perception and acceptance in relation to how it is being commented in different social media platforms through the web, as well as offline through word of mouth. The way this tool works is that it counts the positive plus neutral conversations about the brand/company minus the negative conversations. It can be a useful tool to track what customers have to say about certain product, service or company (Sheehan 2010, 140-141.) This technology could potentially benefit Off-Road Finnmark to realize what the general perception of the social media users is. This type of feedback could assist the company directly to make any changes if needed, or lead the way for any improvements.

There are other ways to measure the success of a social media environment. For example Safko (2010, 724) suggests the use of Google Analytics, since it can be a very effective method. The way it works after registering and creating an account, is possible to save the words or search terms the user wants to be notified about. The author points out that he gets a personal notification every time someone searches his name, the name of his book or the name of any of his associates. (Safko 2010, 724.) Off-Road Finnmark could follow the same path and Mrs. Graumann could be notified when the name of the race is searched through Google or even when someone inquires about Alta. This type of service can give an idea to the company how often people look for data about them, even if the word is used in a website or blog, the company will receive a direct link to where it was used.

Other tool that can provide valuable data to the company about Youtube, which is one environment Off-Road Finnmark is active, is “Youtube Insight”. This application can provide data ranging from the number of downloads of certain video to the amount of time it can take before it becomes a popular video (Safko 2010, 726). Since the company uploads videos to this website, this application will help to recollect data and examine how the videos have been received by the community. As it was discussed previously during the data analysis chapter, Youtube can be a powerful interface to create attention and this tool can provide enough tracking information to learn about trends, which the company could use to develop ideas for their videos.

Off-Road Finnmark, based on the results from both interviews, has their objectives and aims clearly set and wishes to continue to use different tools to take advantage of their benefits. In this case social media is the tool, it has been already been employed by the company, but there is still the opportunity to take advantage of this technology. During the analysis and strategy development chapter, examples about the usage of different social media platforms were provided as well as which steps could be followed to develop their marketing plan. Social media has the possibility to continue to be an important part of their IMC, due to the different options it can provide to the management.

Implementing social media has been possible already, but due to some obstacles such as the lack of time or the amount of personnel available has halted the increase in the usage. It

was discussed earlier in this thesis that is important for any company to focus on the platforms that will provide the most results for them; at this point this would be the most recommended scenario for the company. Not because of the lack of skills or proficiencies, but as it was analyzed previously, is not possible to be effective in every platform if there are not enough resources. Mrs. Graumann tries to remain as active as possible in Facebook and therefore, the first step is to integrate the three platforms in one. This means to continue uploading in this environment the links on their Youtube videos and the link for their Blogger website whenever there is a post. The company should consider using Facebook documents for any releases for their community or other important data if there is not enough time for blogging, it would be simple to access and there is no cost to host the document. Off-Road Finnmark should try to motivate their racers, both from Norway or foreigners, to share their experiences through video. This could possibly connect more the community and there is the possibility that these videos can generate attention about the race or the company.

The examples provided in the previous paragraphs give ORF, a clear perspective of the possibilities to interact with their existing and potential customers. The example provided by Meerman Scott (2010, 40) about Mr. Andre Peters from the 1st Annual Singapore Tattoo Show should be taken in consideration because, using Facebook as a platform the expectations for the Tattoo Show were exceeded by 300%. The company could follow the same path and create a group in Facebook about off-road biking with the possibility that this group could develop a strong community. The group could be named for example, “Off-Road Cycling Scandinavia” or “Off-Road Cycling Fans”. Through this group there is the possibility to give details about the race and encourage interaction with the customers or possible customers. Moreover, it can offer the participants the possibility to interact between themselves, share all different types of content and to create a community. Using the same strategy employed by Mr. Peters managed to exceed the expectations for the event. In line with Meerman Scott’s (2010, 120) and Safko’s (2010, 731) argument ORF needs to be perseverant and do not allow to be discouraged if any shortcoming happens, because social media has no exact formula for success. Moreover, it is important to remember there are different ways to measure the ROI and therefore, this could be a motivation to Off-Road Finnmark and keep on using this platform.

5 CONCLUSIONS

In this ever changing business world, it is necessary to adapt constantly to the new technologies which are being developed. In this case study the technology is social media. Social media is providing a way to small and medium sized enterprises to market their brand without having to spend a huge amount of their marketing budget. This tool offers different platforms which companies could use depending on their needs, interests and/or proficiencies. Off-Road Finnmark has been already employing this tool for their IMC, to try to reach out to more people and create awareness about their event. The company has tried to remain active even though, the lack of resources has been an obstacle.

The objective of this thesis was to integrate social media in Off-Road Finnmark's IMC and assist the company by developing a strategy so they can continue to implement their tool in their marketing strategies. Another objective of this research work was to assist the company to create a strategy which would assist ORF to increase the presence of social media within their IMC. In order to achieve this first objective, a theoretical framework was developed because, that would support the findings from the empirical research. The literature review of this work consisted in the definitions of important concepts, such as social media and integrated marketing communications. The advantages and disadvantages of social media were discussed as well. It was important to have a strong theoretical framework in order to provide support to the empirical research, and to be able to answer the first research question of this thesis.

The empirical part of this research consisted in an in-depth interview with Mrs. Connie Graumann, which is in charge of the marketing of Off-Road Finnmark. Based on the findings of the interview, ORF has tried to remain active in three different social media settings unfortunately, due to limitations in personnel and resources it has not been possible. In addition, racers from outside Norway serve as ambassadors for the ORF-race in their home countries by distributing advertisement of the event and providing data of local biking magazines. The company wishes to continue implementing social media within their IMC in order to achieve their objectives.

Moreover, with this information, a strategy was developed for ORF. Using the data from the literature review and the empirical research, the first step of the strategy was to channel the media usage of the company through a single social media platform. The reason this was decided was because the company does not count with enough personnel or time, and is not possible for Mrs. Graumann to constantly work with the other sites they use, which are Blogger and Youtube. It was recommended to integrate all three platforms, to allow the platforms to be used effectively and to provide enough content for the customers or prospective customers. The other part of the strategy consisted in motivating the customers to interact with each other and with the company. This interaction can be achieved by creating a Facebook group that could help the people interested in off-road cycling to get together and interact more and to share their experiences through videos that could be uploaded to Youtube.

The advantage for the organization is that by word of mouth, there is the opportunity to reach out to an increasing number of prospect customers and there is no need to spend a wide amount of resources. A good reason for why social media could continue to be a part of their IMC is because this tool provides the option to measure ROI. An example can be the usage of Google analytics, and the ability to track every time Off-Road Finnmark or any other concepts related to the company are queried over any search engine or is typed in a website, forum or blog. This type of information can assist the company to take sound decisions regarding their marketing strategy, and could lead to further changes if the company would be interested in any adjustments.

The main challenge for Off-Road Finnmark and Mrs. Connie Graumann is the lack of time and low number of personnel. In addition, the company depends heavily on volunteer work. These challenges could potentially slow down the adoption or development of new strategies related to their marketing communications. Off-Road Finnmark has taken measures to overcome these challenges and continue with their integration of social media in their IMC. The examples given in the theoretical framework provide a good proof that this tool can assist companies or individuals to achieve their objectives furthermore, patience and perseverance are required in order to obtain results.

The limitations for this research were discussed in Chapter 2. The shortcomings of the case method, research and research technique were explained in detail in sub chapters 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4. The interview was divided in two phases, due to the fact that the responses from some questions in the first interview needed more elaboration. Added empirical data was required to provide an in-depth analysis for answering the research questions. After the second phase of the interview was completed, the details acquired were included in the analysis in Chapter 4.

As a suggestion for further research, it could be proposed to apply this type of research to a different type of company. Perhaps an organization that has no experience with social media, in order to find out what are their expectations and implementation ideas are in their IMC. Assisting a company with little or no experience regarding social media would have provided a different perspective of how the strategy could have been developed and how the tool could have been employed.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

1(2)

Interview via email with Mrs. Connie Graumann, Administrative Manager of ORF. The interview results were received on the 18th of November, 2012.

Off-Road Finnmark – Use of social media

Questions from Manuel E. Lopez

1. What is your understanding of social media?
Social media are different ways for us to interact with our riders, volunteers, sponsors and others with interest in our race.
2. Do you have any experience using social media to market the race or the company?
Yes. We use Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/offroadfinnmark>), blogging (<http://offroadfinnmark.blogspot.no/>) and YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/offroadfinnmark/>)
Besides we are active in different discussion forum for bikers, on different biker's blogs and Wikipedia.
3. Do you believe social media can become a support tool for your marketing communications?
Yes, we do!
4. In your opinion, how can OF increase the usage of social media in your marketing communication strategy?
I think that we are pretty active already. The challenge is to keep up the activity.
5. When do you think OF can start using social media for their marketing communication?
N/A

6. Do you think the staff would need to develop additional proficiencies to use social media effectively?

No. But you need to know where to find your 'customer'.

7. How can you implement social media on your current marketing strategy?

We already have

8. What is the status of the current integrated marketing communications of Off-Road Finnmark?

See question #2

9. Do you believe social media can assist you to reach out to more customers or prospects?

Yes!

10. Do you think integrating social media to your current marketing communications can provide any benefits?

Yes. We can communicate more effectively with our 'customers'. We know that riders who have participated in our race are our best marketers. And the best way for them to market the race is to tell other riders about their own experience in Off-Road Finnmark amongst other things in social media.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS VIA SKYPE

Appendix 2

1(2)

The second interview via Skype with Mrs. Connie Graumann, Administrative Manager of ORF. The interview was held on the 28th of November of 2012, between 11:11 am and 11:27 am.

1. Do you believe social media can become a support tool for your marketing communications?

The market is our riders, mostly in Norway, also in other places in the world. We use primarily Facebook to get in touch with new and former riders. The community is sharing tips on how to prepare and which equipment to use. A blog is being used but not so frequently. Twitter is not being used. We try to focus on just one social media platform.

2. In your opinion, how can OF increase the usage of social media in your marketing communication strategy?

One thing that can be done better is to stay is to provide more data in English on Facebook. I haven't experienced anyone looking for English data so far. Another way to use Facebook even more is to have some ads, soon this will happen.

3. Do you think the staff would need to develop additional proficiencies to use social media effectively?

To learn more, it's about money and time.

4. How can you implement social media on your current marketing strategy?

We have marketing superior plan a: Describes how the work should be done.

Plan b: Working plan, using this plan is determined which news should be written. Which press releases should be delivered. What advertisement should be used for foreign and local magazines.

5. What is the status of the current integrated marketing communications of Off-Road Finnmark?

Our most important marketing tool is through the riders, the riders are the ambassadors. A group of former riders from Sweden wondered how they could market the race in their country, I sent material and they distribute it. Riders outside of Norway provide the information on which magazines they read and I contact them and send them information about the race. I was in South Africa through a magazine and I was able to create some contacts there.

6. Do you believe social media can assist you to reach out to more customers or prospects?
Is already a tool in the way of FB, blog and Youtube. It is important for the riders to see film from the race. Most of the videos are taken during the race and afterwards, the duration of the videos varies.